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Report on 2011 Innovative Course Development Grants

Project Title: Enhancing Student Learning via Problem-Based Learning

Course: CJUS 330 – Correctional Theory and Institutions

Project Description:

To date, the Course Correctional Theory and Institutions has been taught as a lecture-based class where student learning is mostly passive rather than active. In order to enhance student learning it is imperative to implement active learning strategies. One such active learning strategy is problem-based learning. Students will be assigned to groups of four. They will stay together as a group for the entire quarter. Every week students will be presented with a real life problem applicable to the topic that is being discussed. Students will work on solving the problem, present their report to the class, and turn in a written report at the end of each week. Students will evaluate the problem and each other at the end of the week. There are eight problems = eight weeks. Week one will be used for introduction and week 10 will be used for review and evaluation.

- This part is complete: Please find the syllabus attached.

Each problem will be approached in a similar way, which ensures consistency and helps students improve their skills. The first day of week is used to discuss the chapter material. Following, the problem will be introduced either as video clip or a newspaper story. For instance, students learn about solitary confinement by reading the book and completing the homework assignment for that chapter. This gives them a basic understanding of the material which will then be discussed during the first class session. Following, students will watch the video Frontline: “Solitary Confinement,” which shows problems and issues associated with isolating persons for several years and releasing them into the community without effective reintegration strategies. After watching and discussing the information provided in the video students receive their problem for the week. The problem is closely related to what students have learned from the book and the video.

- This part is complete: Please find Appendix 1 attached.

As homework, students will be asked to think about the problem individually and determine what they have to do to solve the problem. During the second class period, students will get together with their group and compile a list of learning issues they need to address. After groups have compiled their lists the class as a whole is asked to share what they determined to be learning issues and what strategies they might use to approach the problem. Students will receive feedback and if necessary some structure to stay on track. The groups will then continue with their discussions. Each group will keep a written log of the discussion which must be turned in together with their final group report. At the end of the second class period students will then write down what they will research for the next class in order to solve the problem. Each student must complete their own research report which will be part of the group report but graded individually for each student.

- This part will be completed by students in class – Winter 2012. Class is scheduled T, TH: 12 -1:50pm

In preparation for the final class for the week students will bring a copy of their individual research report to class. Each group has to communicate before the final class period and discuss their research finding and work on their group report (solution to the problem). During the final class period the groups receive 15 minutes to prepare their group reports for oral presentation, including what key issues they had identified and researched, how they approached the problems, and what solution they had developed. Three to four groups (either volunteers or picked randomly – ensuring that each group presents during the quarter) will be asked to present their reports. Following, the class will discuss what problems they had encountered in approaching the problem, doing research, determining which information was important and reliable, what they had learned about the topic, and what changes to the correctional policies they would make if they were policy makers. When appropriate I provided students with more information about the topic, recent courts cases, etc. (please see Appendix 2 for class structure).

- This part will be completed by students in class – Winter 2012. Class is scheduled T, TH: 12 -1:50pm

- Class Structure is complete: Please see Syllabus attached

In order to give students some structure the class discussions are used to provide students with guidance notes on important issues that needed to be addressed in their report. Additionally, students will receive grading rubrics for each problem to ensure that they understood the grading criteria for each problem. The purpose was to give students the opportunity to evaluate their work (report) and improve it before turning it in. Self-evaluation is one of the learning goals of this course and in order to facilitate that goal students have to be aware of what is being graded and how it is being graded. Very often students believe that the grading of papers is “very subjective.” By providing specific grading rubrics for each problem students realized that grading their papers is a fairly straight forward task.

- Grading Rubrics are complete: Please see Appendix 2 for Homework Assignments

Following the class discussion I demonstrate on the overhead projector (with a fake example report) how the report would be graded using the grading rubrics provided to the students. I asked each group to follow the instructions and grade their own reports, record their score, and turn in their reports. Self-evaluation allows students to assess their own strengths and weaknesses and make changes for the next problem.